Pliska - 100 years of archaeological excavations

The discovery of Pliska

The name *Pliska* is Slavic in origin. According to the linguists it is cognate with the Old Russian word *pleso, pljos*, meaning 'a lake, a swamp'. Probably the Slavs had given this name to the drained nowadays swamp near the town of Kaspichan or to some of the rivers running earby. Similar names are known throughout the Slavic area. Even now, there is a small town called Pliskov in Central Ukraine, in the Vinicka district. This town is situated at the border between two archaeological cultures of the VI-VII c. AD, which are connected with the early Slavs — the Penkovo and the Prague-Korchak.

Pliska (under the form of *Plyuska*) is mentioned for the last time in the Bulgarian Apocriphal Chronicle of the XI c. Notwithstanding the fact that import historical events occurred in its vicinity at the time of the Second Bulgarian Empire, its name does not appear in either Bulgarian or foreign sources. But the name was not forgotten, it was even known in Western Europe. It appeared for the first time on a geographical map printed in 1688 AD in Amsterdam. A little bit later it appeared on other Western European maps. It is unlikely that anybody back then knew what this old town looked like or where it was situated. Western European travellers had limited access to the then Ottoman Empire, and Pliska was situated along a rarely used by them road. The German traveller Karsten Nibur passed through these places in 1767 AD and heard that near the town of Novi Pazar there were ruins of a large town, but he could not visit the site and did not know its name. In 1878 AD the Hungarian Felix Kanic inspected the ruins, managed to read the name 'Burdizo' on a half-buried stone column and assumed that this was the name of the town. This uncertainty was due to the fact that Aboba — the name of the small Turko-Tatar village that was established at the site the XVII c. had no connection with the name of the long abandoned and forgotten town. Only in 1884 AD, during his big tour of Bulgaria, the Czech historian Constantine Irechek realised that the ruins next to the village of Aboba were remains of the town of *Pliskova*, mentioned by Byzantine chroniclers of the X-XI c. AD [1]

Constantine Irechek

Karel Skorpil

Fjodor Uspenskij

A bit earlier the brothers Herman and Karel Skorpil had settled in Bulgaria as a part of a large group of Czechs, whose aim was to assist the newly established Bulgarian state. Herman and Karel started work as teachers in natural science and mathematics, devoting their free time to the search and description of antiquities. The latter turned out to be Karel's true vocation. He was born on 15.07.1859 in the town of Visoko Mito, Czechia. He graduated in mathematics, but ancient history attracted him stronger. After settling in the Bulgarian town of Varna he started to systematically inspect north-eastern Bulgaria. The ruins at Aboba impressed him deeply. He visited them repeatedly and the views of the large stone fortress and, especially, of the earthen ramparts made him ask himself whether this town was in existence even before its mentioning in the X c. and whether the older capital of Bulgaria, prior to Preslav, was here. His view was a herecy at the time when it was thought that Preslav was the only capital of the First Bulgarian kingdom.

Initially Karel Skorpil did not express his suspicions openly. But with time evidence in his support accumulated. The stone fortress was surrounded by an enormous earthen rampart of a type unknown from either the Christian Bulgarian or the earlier Romano-Byzantine periods. Around the rampart there were *devtashlars* – sites of erected stones, placed in orderly fashion, which were undoubtedly connected with pagan customs and rites. The ruins of the mysterious town and the surrounding area produced several Greek language inscriptions from the pre-Christian Bulgarian period. The names of the rulers Omurtag and Malamir could be read on them. Besides this evidence, the distance of 85 km between the old and the new palace of the ruler Omurtag, stated in the inscription from Veliko Turnovo, did not correspond to the distance between Preslav and any part of Danube. Karel Skorpil was aware of the authorative explanation of C. Irechek, but he was not convinced by it. At least he expressed his views. In 1897 we read in his book "Mogili" ("Mounds") that: "... *here* (at Aboba) *was, I think, the old Bulgarian capital of Asparukh, Krum, Omortag and Malamer, the capital having moved after that to the near-by Preslav*." [2] This laconical conclusion was repeated in the Annual report of the Varna archaeological society from 1897-1898. The views of Skorpil came to the knowledge of the eminent Russian Byzantologist Fjodor Uspenskij, at that time — the head of the Russian Archaeological institute in Constantinople. The Russian scholar was known for his efforts to reveal the true place of the Slavs in their relations with Byzantium and supported an attempt to locate the oldest capital of Bulgaria.

Stone inscription of khan Omortag, found in Veliko Turnovo, speaking about the building of a fine dwelling at the river Danube
DOvcharov, p. 83

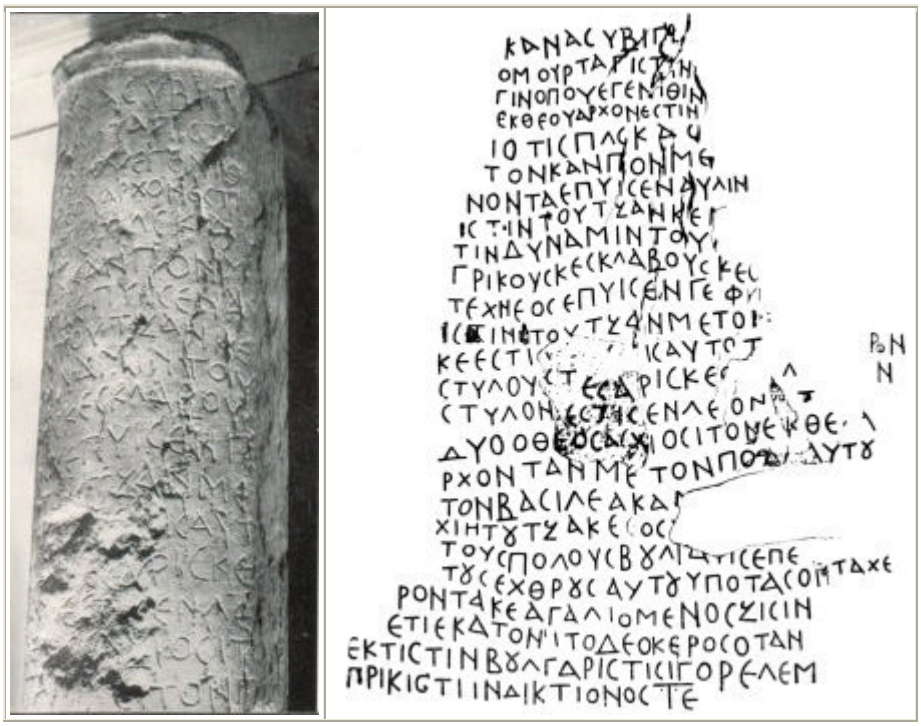
+ Κα(ν)α συβι– γη Ωμο– ρταγ ι– σ τον πολε– ον υκον α– υτου μενο(ν) επυησεν υπ– ερφυμον υκο(ν) ισ τον Δανουβ– ην κ(ε) αναμεσα τον δυο υκο(ν) τον πανφυ– μο(ν) καταμετρη– σασ ισ τιν αυτη(ν) μεσην€ε– πυισα τουμβαν κε απο τιν αυτη(ν) μεσην τησ τουμβασ εοσ την αυλι(ν) μου την αρχεα(ν) ισιν οργηε μυριαδεσ β| κ(ε) επι τον Δ– ανουβιν ισην οργιεσ μυριαδεσ β|. το αυτο τουβι(ν) εστιν πανφυμο(ν) κ(ε) μετρισα(ν)– τεσ τιν γιν επυισα τα γραμα– τα ταυτα. ο ανθροποσ κ(ε) κ–	"Kanasubigi Omortag, inhabiting his old home, made a famous home at the Danube and in the middle between these famous homes, after he took measurements, he made a mound, and from the middle of this mound to my old palace it is 20,000 measures and to the Danube it is another 20,000 measures. The mound itself is famous and

αλα ζον αποθνισκι κε αλ– οσ γενατε κε ινα ο εσχατον γη– νομετοσ ταυτα θεορον€υπομνη– σκετε τον πυισαντα αυτο. το δε δ– νομα του αρχοντοσ εστην Ω– μορταγ καν<ν>α συβιγη ο Θ(εο)σ α– ζηοσι αυτον ζισε ετ– η ρ| .	after I measured the land, I made this inscription. A man even if he lives well, dies and another is born. Let the one born later, when looking at this inscription, remembers the one who made it. And the name of the archon is Omortag kana subugi. Let God grants him to live for a hundred years."

In June 1899 F. Uspenskij, accompanied by his assistant M. Popruzhenko, arrived in Bulgaria in order to select a place for the sponsored by his institute excavations. The Bulgarian Ministry of Education on its part dispatched K. Skorpil and the historian V.N. Zlatarski and this four-men commission left for Aboba. There Skorpil presented his arguments in detail. They were accepted by the rest of the commission as worthy an excavation. The arguments were repeated publicly a little bit later by V. Zlatarski at an archaeological congress in Kiev [3].

The excavations started on October 6, 1899, with 20 workers. Their number increased to 35 by the end of the season. A mound of ruins, called "Sarajeri" ("Palace") by the local Turkish population was excavated. On October 16, 10 workers were send to start digs at the locality "Klise-eri" ("Church"). Skorpil's feeling of the site allowed him to select the two most significant monuments of Pliska, designated as early as then as the **Throne Palace** and the **Large Basilica**. The results were surprising and impressive. The excavated buildings, despite the destruction, were so impressive, that initially F. Uspenskij thought they were not Bulgarian, but Byzantine. The excavations continued in 1900, when the work on the localities from the previous year was finished and new, partial excavations of the stone fortress and of buildings to the west and to the north of the palace were initiated. A large pagan temple, converted consequently into a church, and two buildings, described as the living quarters of a palace were discovered. The massive stone walls, built of large ashlars, the layout of the buildings as well as the artefacts did not leave space for doubt — this was the capital of Bulgaria from the pagan period. Its name, however, was not revealed. Was it unknown to the sources or was it indeed the mentioned in X-XI c. sources 'Pliskova'?

The excavations could not answer this question.



Inscription bearing the name of Pliska ('PLSKA') found in the aul of Omurtag at the village of Khan Krum (Chatalar)

SVaklinov, p. 122

Κανα συβιγι Ωμορταγ ισ τιν γιν οπου εγενιθιν, εκ Θεου αρχον εστιν. ισ τισ Πλσκασ τον κανπον με– νοντα επυισεν αυλιν ισ τιν τουτζαν κε με[τιγαγεν τιν δυναμιν του [ισ τουσ Γρυκοσ κε σκλαβουσ κε τεχνεοσ επυισεν γεφυ[ραν ισ τιν Τουτζαν με το αυλιν στυλουσ τεσαρισ κε ε[πανο τον στυλον εστισεν λεον[τασ δυο. ο Θεοσ αξιοσι τον εκ Θεου α– χονταν€ με τον ποδα αουτου τον βασιλεα καλο[πατουντα, εοσ τρε– χι η Τουτζα κε εοσ [——— τουσ πολουσ Βουλγαρισ επεχουν[τα, τουσ εχθρουσ αυτου υποτασοντα χε– ροντα κε αγαλιομενοσ ζισιν	"Kanasubigi Omortag is by God ruler of the land he was born in. Living in the camp of Pliska, he built a small camp on (the river of) Ticha and moved his army there against Greeks and Slavs [*]. And he skilfully made a bridge over Ticha together with the small camp and he put four columns in this small camp, and on top of the columns - two lions. Let God grant the archon placed by God to trample well with his feet the emperor until Ticha flows and until ..., as he rules over the many Bulgarians and

ετι εκατον. ιτο δε ο κεροσ, οταν εκτισταν, βουλγαριστι σιγορ ελεμ, γρικιστι ινδικτιονοσ ιε| .	subjugates his enemies, to live in happiness and joy for a hundred years. The time when this was built was in Bulgarian shigor elem, and in Greek - indiction 15." *[* Omurtag, who kept a 'deep' peace with the Byzantines (see the 30-year peace treaty from Sechishte/Sjulejmankjoj), probably has in mind Thomas the Slav, the Byzantine rebel who proclaimed himself an emperor. Later, Omurtag defeated Thomas near Constantinople]*

The following years were devoted to the preparation of the report, published in 1905 in vol. X of the Russian institute's journal [4]. The work was done mainly by K. Skorpil. Meanwhile, in 1905 F. Uspenskij organized minor excavations at Preslav. At the same time, following Skorpil's advice, the young archaeologist from Shumen, Rafail Popov, excavated a large half-buried stone column in the field to the west of the then village of Chatalar (modern Tsar Krum), at 6 km to the north of Preslav, on the road towards Pliska. The 25-lines of Greek text on this column inform about a palace, which Omurtag built along the river Ticha in 821-822 AD. In the inscription Omurtag calls his residence 'the military camp Pliska'. Thus we came to know the name of the first capital. A little bit later the Bulgarian Apocriphal Chronicle from the XI c. was also discovered. The chronicle attributed the foundation of Pliska to tsar Ispor (Asparukh).

Karel Skorpil had a real archaeological discovery on his hands. It was not incidental, but deliberate, the fruit of a long period of preliminary work. In some aspects it mirrors some of the discoveries of the European archaeology in the Asia Minor, the Near East and Egypt.

History of the investigations

There were no further excavations after these of F. Uspenskij and K. Schorpil in Pliska in the next thirty years. Their discoveries and conclusions were accepted by the scholars as something to be admired. Disputable remained only the problem of the antique building elements, found during the excavations – predominantly bricks with private and state Roman and Byzantine stamps. On the basis of these there was formulated the hypothesis that Pliska was built on the site of a Roman village [5]. The idea did not find solid support but it resurfaced some forty years later. The digs were resumed as late as in the 1930s. The Union of the archaeological societies from north-eastern Bulgaria "Bulgarska starina" ("Bulgarian Antiquity") sponsored the clearing of the accumulated soil and the facilitation of the public access to the site. This was followed by new, partial excavations around the palaces which yielded important results. In several pits, dug by Krustjo Mitjaev beneath the foundations of the Throne Palace, he found the remains of a massive building, several times larger then the Throne Palace. In many places there were signs of a massive fire — ashes, coal, burned building elements. There were also discovered the burned remains of a secret underground passage leading from the palace to the north. Mitjaev connected these remains of a fire with the mentioned in the sources burning of the palace of khan Krum by the Byzantine emperor Nicephorus I in 811 A.D. [6]. He called the building "**Krum's Palace**". To the north of the **Small Palace** Mitjaev unearthed a solid building whose layout resembled that of the palace and, hence, called it **Bolyar dwelling**. At the same time Petur Karasimeonov cleared one part of the courtyard in front of the Small Palace and found the foundation of a pagan temple, and to the west of it — the remains of two baths and a small church [7]. Thus new buildings began to appear around the Palace centre excavated by K. Skorpil. New data allowed also for a better periodization of the individual buildings. At the same time the Hungarian Geza Feher excavated mound No XXXIII. At the top, beneath a thick layer of ash, Feher found around twenty clay vessels — the first artefacts of the proper proto-Bulgarian culture in Pliska. But he did not give them the attention they deserved. Around that time dominant became the idea that the layout and the building technique in Pliska were a manifestation of the proto-Bulgarian originality and of direct contacts with the Sassanian culture of Iran [8]. These unjustified statements stifled the sober views of K. Mitjaev about the similarity between the Pliska palaces and the contemporary to them Byzantine architecture [9].

Regardless of the post-war difficulties, Pliska was among the few sites of regular excavations initiated after 1945. They were concentrated on the territory of the so called **Outer town** — the area between the stone fortress and the earthen rampart and ditch. Even Schkorpil had pointed out various ruins of buildings there. They appeared only as not very tall mounds. Beneath some of them there were discovered foundations of churches and of residential buildings. A large complex of residential and business buildings and workshops were investigated around one of the churches (site 31) – the first example of an unknown type that was also being uncovered at Preslav at the same time. But more important was the discovery of the dwellings of the ordinary population of Pliska – quadrangular semi-dugouts heated by stone stoves. At site 31 these dwellings had constituted one part of a larger settlement, over which the architectural complex was later built. Consequent excavations at the banks of the stream Assar-dere, to the west of the stone fortress, showed that there were other

similar settlements in different parts of the Outer town.

The Inner town (aerial picture)
Source: AKuzev, p. 51

The Palace complex of the pagan rulers (aerial picture)
Source: SStanilov2, p. 55

(All pictures refer to Pliska/finds from Pliska unless stated otherwise. The pictures come from more than one source. See Abbreviations)

The excavations of the Palace centre were resumed at the end of the 1950's and during the 1960's. A large reservoir was found next to the western wall of the enclosure around the Small Palace, one more bath – close to the reservoir. The accumulation of new data led to attempts to order chronologically the buildings and to access their cultural and historical value [10]. The new generation of archaeologist, working at Pliska, did not have an united opinion about the dates of the massive stone buildings and the surrounding them fortress walls. In the 1950's the linguist D. Krunzhalov, who emigrated to Czechoslovakia, developed the hypothesis that Pliska was a Roman town. He published several works trying to show that all monumental stone constructions there dated from Roman time. His conclusions were explicitly or implicitly shared by some archaeologists, including those working at Pliska [11]. Other archaeologists did not agree with Krunzhalov's views as they contradicted the archaeology of the site [12]. The discussion about Pliska also led to a more general discussion about the impact and the role of the Slavs and the proto-Bulgarians as builders of the old Bulgarian culture. The "antiquity" researchers summarily dismissed any contribution of the proto-Bulgarians, referring to their "nomadism" and granted the lion's share of the old Bulgarian achievements to the Slavs as a the "more cultured" people [13]. Their opponent St. Stanchev (a.k.a Vaklinov) pointed to the historical role of the proto-Bulgarians in the establishment and the management of the [Bulgarian] state and to their decisive importance for the building of the monumental constructions in Pliska [14]. The dispute was an echo of the recurring ideological bias in the Bulgarian scholarship, this time – in the years after 1944, which glorified the Slavs at the expense of the previously (in the pre-WWII years) glorified proto-Bulgarians. Although the two sides in the dispute held to their views, the ensuing discussion allowed the public to hear their detailed arguments. In the meanwhile, the general tendency of national uniqueness, which was gaining grounds in the 1960's, did not allow the thesis about the antique (Roman) origin of Pliska and about the "low

culture" of the proto-Bulgarians to become the official point of view of the Bulgarian archaeology.

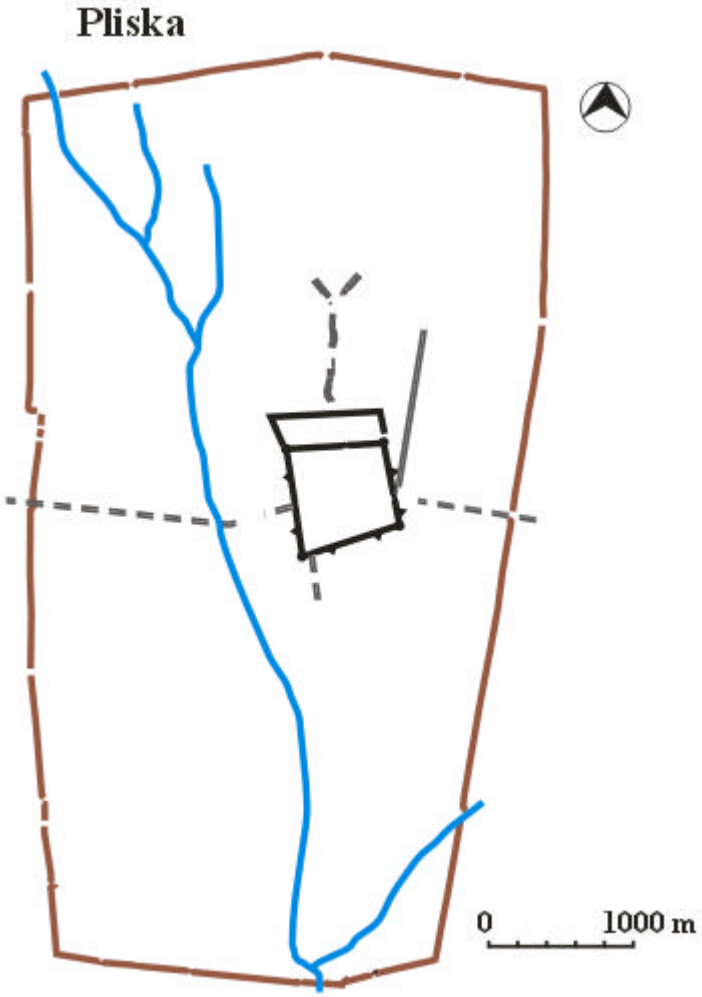
A new discovery served to resolve the disputes and the tensions around Pliska. During additional investigations at the Large Basilica Stamen Mihajlov found four stone sarcophagi. One of them was covered by a reused plate on which there was chiselled out a grave inscription from the time of khan Omurtag. Another sarcophagus – No 4, was tightly closed. Even before its opening, it was expected that the sarcophagus would be the resting place of a high-ranking official. Pliska and the Pliska sarcophagi earned wide popularity. The then chairman of the State Council Todor Zhivkov sent a special greeting to the Bulgarian archaeologists. A special chamber was built over the sarcophagi, lifting equipment and facilities for immediate conservation of organic remains were brought. The heads of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences and members of the cabinet arrived at the site. The excavator himself was not allowed to the chamber and was forced to leave the site and Pliska. The opening of sarcophagus No 4 brought disappointment. Instead of the expected regal insignia there was found a skeleton in an advanced state of decomposition, together with the remains of two leather belts, one of them – with a golden buckle and a golden point.

The beginning of the 1970's [15] saw changes in the teams working at Pliska and Preslav. The leadership was entrusted to a three-man committee headed by the Director of the Archaeological Institute of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. A long-term programme of excavations over wide area was established which led to the location of new archaeological monuments and to the elucidation of the nature of previously excavated ones. The new materials as well as the forthcoming celebration of the 1300th anniversary of the creation of Bulgaria (in 1981) led to the creation of a special branch of the Archaeological Institute at Shumen and to the publication of a collection "Pliska-Preslav". Three sites, initiated by K. Skorpil, were excavated at Pliska – the Palace centre, the Large Basilica, and the fortress walls. Wide restoration works were also planned (fortunately, the latter projects were not realised). The generous funding allowed the archaeological season to start in April and end in October-November for years in a row. The result towards the end of 1981 was impressive. The monastery around the Large Basilica was completely studied; additional studies were done in the basilica itself. The northern half of the eastern as well as a sector of the northern fortress walls were uncovered. The southern and western walls (1,500 m in total length), the so called Krum's Palace and building No 32 were all completely uncovered. Additional studies were done in the baths, the secret tunnels in the Citadel, the earthen ramparts as well as of some of the devtashlars. The most important result was the discovery of traces of wooden buildings in the Palace centre. Stratigraphically, they preceded the stone constructions and represented a new, most early horizon. During this period, a Soviet expedition under the leadership of S.A. Pletnjova worked in the region to the south of the palaces. It discovered the remains of, probably, the earliest defensive construction – a double wooden wall [16].

After the end of the celebrations around the 1300th anniversary of Bulgaria, the excavations continued for some years in the same fashion, but under severely reduced funding. The digs in the Palace centre, at the western fortress wall and of the settlement next to site No 31 continued. New digs started at the site of a suspected reservoir next to the Boljar dwelling, at the settlement next to church No 11, at the

complexes of workshops and dwellings in the Outer town. The digging of irrigational canals in the Outer town uncovered new archaeological monuments over a large territory. After 1989 there were further, more extreme cuts in the funding which allowed for limited digs only. This tendency reached its final point in the years 1997-1999, when no funding was allocated and any digs at the defended perimeter of Pliska practically ceased. The National Museum of History intervened in these years by allocating funds for study of the mounds to the west of the earthen rampart. The joint Germano-Bulgarian expedition, which started work in 1997, practically returned the excavations to their initial stage in 1899 in respect to the funding.

The legacy of Pliska



Pliska. The earthen ramparts of the Outer town and the stone fortress of the Inner town

Over the last 100 years, various sectors of the defended territory of Pliska, some 23.3 km^2, have been excavated. At present, only around 0.5 % of this territory has been studied by the standard method of excavation/uncovering, by the digging of pits and irrigation canals. Regardless of that, a relatively complete picture of the material culture could be built on the abundance of various artefacts. The latter belong to several groups.

1. Defensive constructions

So far the territory of Pliska yielded three types of defensive constructions. Their concentric positioning allowed the introduction of the terms Inner town and Outer town. Most imposing in its size is the outer earthen rampart and ditch – a rectangle with sides of 7 x 7 x 3.4 x 2.9 km, which surrounded several inhabited areas. Its size makes it the largest among several similar constructions dating from the pagan period of the First Bulgarian kingdom. Besides the four main entrances on its four sides, there were additional entrances, especially on its south-western side, where a road led

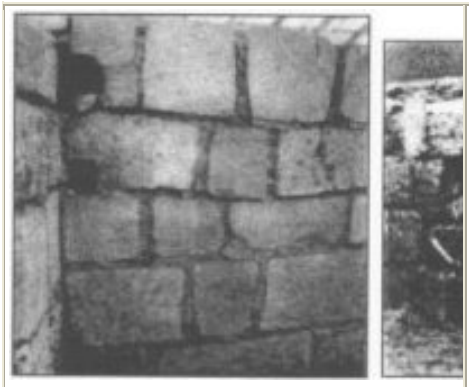
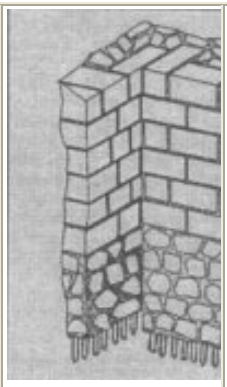
to the second-largest such defensive perimeter, near the modern horse-breeding farm of Kabijuk. The rampart was built out of the soil removed from the ditch. At places, where the ditch had cut into beds of marls situated close to the surface, the faces of the ditch were formed as a wall built of marl stones. So far no additional wooden palisades or similar obstructions have been found, but their existence cannot be ruled out. There is no exact data to allow to date the rampart, but it is rightfully assumed that it is among the earliest built constructions around the capital.

The earthen rampart:

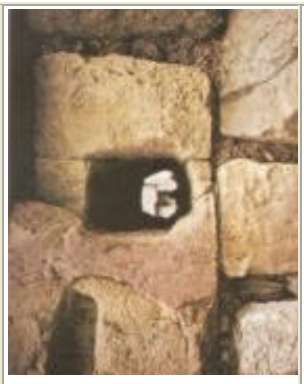
Trench in the north *AKuzev, p. 35*	Trench in the south-western corner *AKuzev, p. 36*	Trench through the northern side *SVaklinov, p. 32*

No less imposing is the situated at the centre of the rampart stone fortress, which delineates the territory of the Inner town. In Byzantine and local Bulgarian sources from the first half of the IX c. AD this fortress, together with the palace buildings inside it, are designated by the Greek term ‘aul’ meaning ‘court’, ‘palace’, ‘fortified palace’. The aul has the form of an irregular rectangle, 48 hectares in area. Facilitated by the flat ground, its walls had been traced almost in straight lines. In the middle of three of them – the eastern, the western and the northern wall – there were gates, each flanked by four symmetrical towers, protruding forwards and backwards from the wall. At the level of the first floor they joined together into a single unit by a brick-lain vaulted arch above the passage. The massive towers thus formed rose to a 13-14 metre in height and were probably the tallest constructions in the capital. Initially, the passage was blocked by two gates – a coming down (cataract) and a two-leaved one. During a later restructuring which affected all three gates, the coming down gate was preserved, the two-leaved one was moved inwards and one more two-leaved gate was placed at the beginning of the passage. The vaulted arch was then rebuilt solely of bricks. Only the southern gate retained its original state. Due to peculiarities of the terrain, it was moved towards the western end of the wall. Channels for pouring hot liquids upon an enemy who would succeed in reaching the passage below were cut into its stone vaulted arch. The ascent to the floors above all of the gates was by the way of spiral stairways, built in one of the inner towers. At the corners of the fortress there were circular towers, and along its walls – a pentagonal ones. The Pliska fortress was a representative rather than defensive construction. Its frontal towers were too far apart, it lacked the convenient outer stairways for access to the battle platforms. The faced with fine red mortar joints softened the severity of the smooth walls and gave them a touch of picturesqueness and colour. The fortress can be tentatively dated towards the very beginning of the IX c. AD.

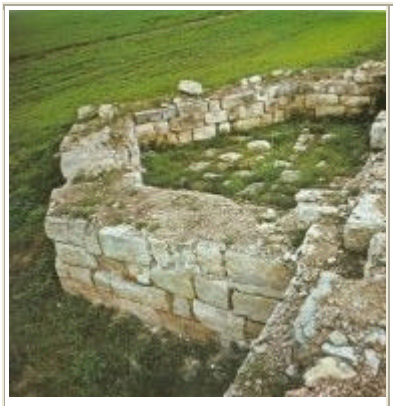
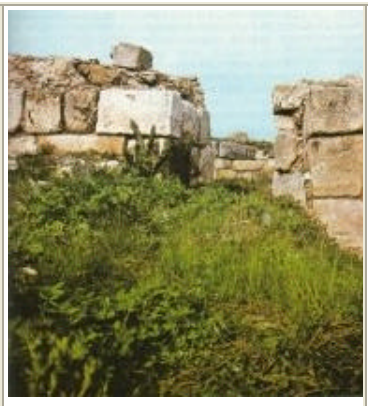
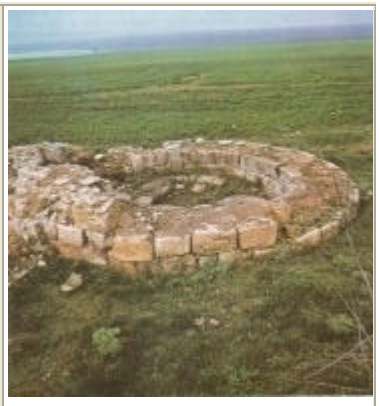
Stone walls:

			
The characteristic proto-Bulgarian ashlar building technique with wide, red-coloured joints, from Preslav and Pliska *NTjuleshkov, p. 44*	Structure of the Pliska fortress after T. Balabanov *NTjuleshkov, p. 44*	The eastern fortress wall	The western fortress wall *AKuzev, p. 50.*

Gates:

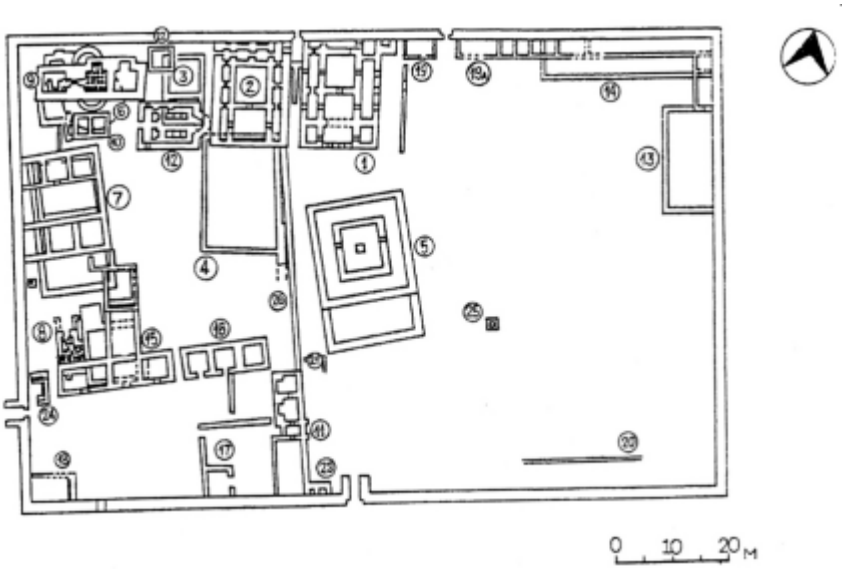
			
The Eastern gate of the stone fortress *SVaklinov, p. 64*	The Western gate built of ashlars and with a facing of bricks *AKuzev, p. 76*	Nest for the beam blocking the two-leaved gate *AKuzev. p. 77*	Graphical reconstruction of the Western gate of the Inner town *DOvcharov, p. 69*

Towers:

		
Pentagonal tower *AKuzev, p. 79*	Entrance to a pentagonal tower *AKuzev, p. 71*	Round tower *AKuzev, p, 80*

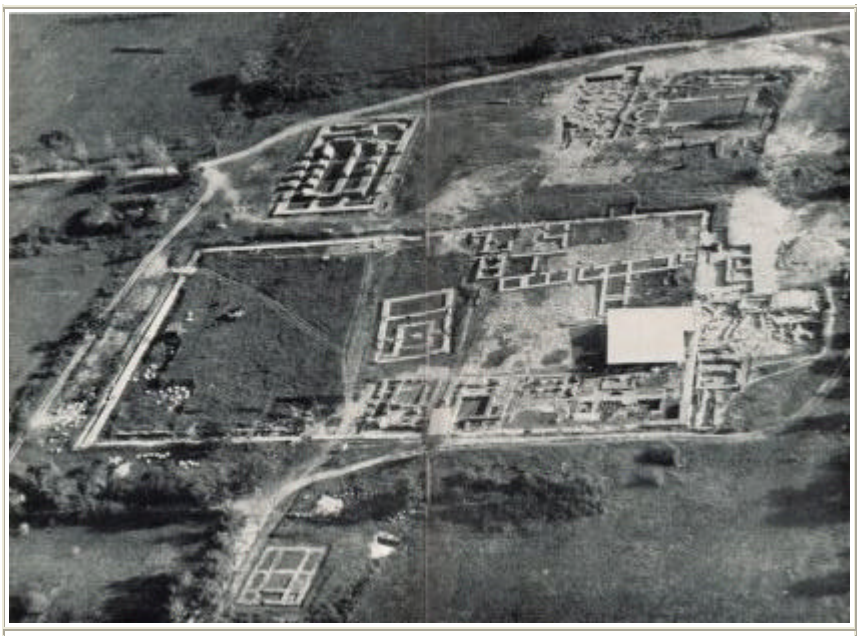
The third defensive construction was the double wooden wall, so far studied only in its southern part. Wooden posts were tightly driven in two parallel rows, 2 metre apart. The space between them was probably not filled with clay or stones. The exact size of this construction is still unknown. The building technique suggests that this wall surrounded the earliest buildings in the centre of Pliska, which were also built of wood. All they can be tentatively dated to the VIII c. AD.

In the centre of the Inner town there are the remains of a brick wall, surrounding the residential palace and the buildings around it, some 1 hectare in area. It was built of bricks over a stone foundation which in turn rested on a wooden grill. On its northern wall there were two ordinary gates, on the western and southern walls – gates with narrow passages. It seems that there were decorative pinnacles on the top of the wall, covered by stone lids which were significantly smaller by those covering the pinnacles of the stone fortress. The solid foundations of the brick wall make it part of the defensive structure of the capital. As its innermost defensive perimeter it may be named the **Citadel**. It was probably the model for the later stone fortresses-palaces in Preslav and at the village of Khan Krum.



Pliska. The Citadel

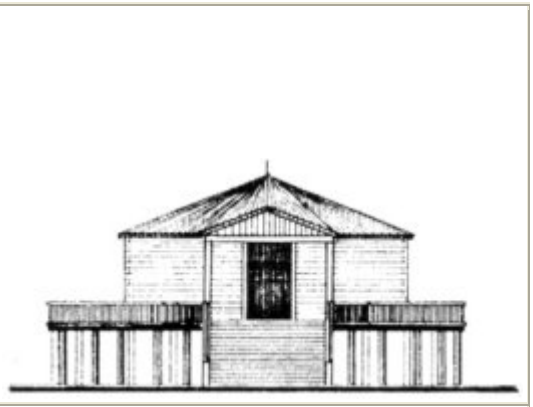
Along mounds No XXXII and XXXIII there can be traced the remains of a ditch and a not very high rampart, regarded by some archaeologists as part of the earthen rampart – the initial earthen defence of the Inner town. Its study is still ongoing.



The Palace centre. Panoramic view
SVaklinov, p.48

The earliest construction works at Pliska were undertaken at the seat of the ruler. The first buildings were wooden. We know little about their layout. Over most of them there were later laid the foundations of the stone buildings and the pavements around

them, the wooden remains have only partially been preserved or not studied yet.

	
Remains of a jurt-like wooden building	Reconstruction of the wooden jurt of the ruler in the centre of Pliska (after R. Rashev and V. Docheva) *SStanilov, p. 51*

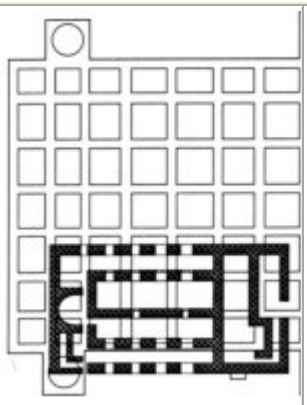
So far we have the layout of only one wooden building. It has the form of a double or triple circle, with an elongated rectangular construction added to the south. It has been reconstructed as a jurt-type building, raised above the ground. One central and two side staircases or platforms led to it. A special small staircase on its northern side probably points out to its representative function. It was a dwelling or a palace of the VIIIth c. khans, to which period it has been tentatively dated. The remains of similar wooden constructions have been found under the foundation of several later stone buildings in the Palace centre and aside of it. It seems that the initial khan's residence was built entirely of wood and that it occupied roughly the same area as the later stone buildings. There took place a kind of monumentalization process of the "wooden" resindence. This was assumed as early as by Kr. Mitjaev after the discovery of the Krum's Palace. It cannot be ruled out that, similarly to the residence of Attila, some of the earliest stone baths in the Palace centre were already in existence next to the wooden palace.

The monuments of the stone architecture have been studied in much greater detail. Two groups of stone buildings can be distinguished on the basis of the building technique and materials – constructions of large ashlars bound by mortar, and constructions of broken stones bound by mud. The first group has been not entirely properly named 'monumental architecture'. The foundations of the buildings of this type are, with no exceptions, laid on a mortar layer put on top of driven into the ground wooden poles of quadrangular or circular cross-section. The poles served to increase the density of the loess layer under the foundations and to block slumps or deformations in the walls. The most significant buildings of Pliska fall into this group.

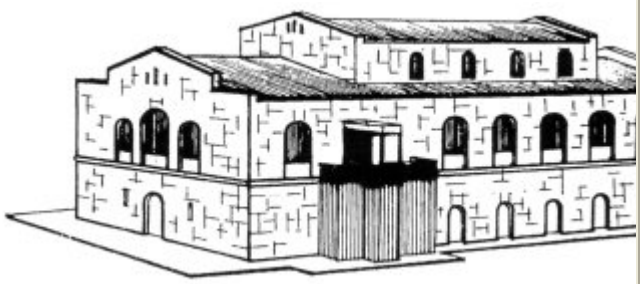
The earliest monumental stone building of the first group was the Krum's Palace. Only the underlying mortar layer and an insignificant part of the stone construction have survived. The stone blocks have been removed and reused elsewhere. Their place was taken by building refuse, part of it was mixed with ash and charcoals and shows signs of burns. This allows the palace to be linked to the big fire at Pliska in

811 AD (V.K.: i.e. to the capture of Pliska by the Byzantine emperor Nichephorus I) and to khan Krum. The foundations outline a layout composed of 63 rectangular sells. The layout has been interpreted in various ways. Most popular is the vision of a raised courtyard, surrounded by premises. The access was by the ways of spiral staircases in four towers, protruding forward from the eastern and western façades.

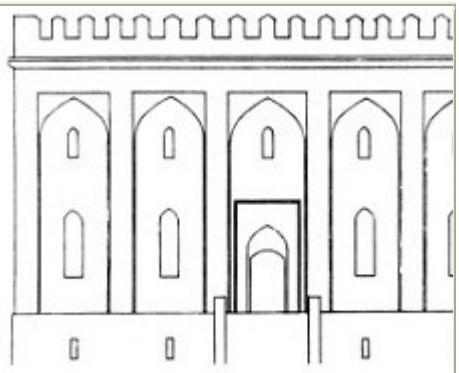
Krum's palace and the Throne palace:

		
Aerial picture *RRashev, p. 133*	Layout of khan Krum's palace and of the Throne palace of khan Omurtag built over its remains *SStanilov2, p. 52*	The remains of Krum's palace *SVaklinov, p. 48*

The remains of the Throne palace *SVaklinov, p. 48, 53*		



Reconstruction of the Throne palace (after R. Rashev)
SStanilov, p. 54



Reconstruction of the façade of the Throne palace
DOvcharov, p. 74

The Throne Palace assumed the functions of a representative building after the destruction of the Krum's Palace. It betrays the desire for topographic continuity with its predecessor and was built over its western half. Its layout is quadrangular, with a built-in apse oriented towards the north. The northern half is the throne hall itself, while the southern half is iccupied by a spacious vestibule. The ground floors of both parts were uninhabited. Openings, some of them – vaulted, had been cut into the walls beneath the throne hall in order to lighten up the thick walls and to absorb, by the way of the vaulted arches, the load of the floor. The ground floor was filled with densely packed pebble. Initially, the visitors' entrance was on the southern side, where a staircase was built in a narrow passage-way. Similar passage-way used, it seems, exclusively by the ruler, was situated at the opposite side of the building. Two rows of columns or built-up pillars divided the throne hall into three naves. The apse at the bottom of the wide central nave formed a semiculrular area, where the throne was situated. A special quadrangular room next to it probably contained the ruler's insignia. The building of the Throne Palace is attributed to khan Omurtag (815-831 AD) and his building programme.

Whinin the Citadel there are several buildings linked with the life of the ruling family. They belong to different building stages. Earliest amongst them are two buildings whose walls had been subsequently dismantled to their foundations. The first of them contained an entrance room and a main, single-cell room. The layout of the other is not clear. Similar to the layout of the first one is that of another building which was later restructured and became part of the so-called Small Palace – the dwelling of the ruling family. During its final stage it contained two similar in their lay out buildings, divided by a narrow corridor which led to a narrow entrance in the northern wall of the Citadel. On the ground they had wide central halls and narrow side corridors which probably all joined together at the level of the floor to form wide halls with colonnades. Pieces of marble plates and columns, found during the excavations, speak about the richness of their interior. The walls of the eastern building still contain fragmens of fine white putty with signs of red paint.

The Citadel - the north-western corner

Excavations at the eastern half of the Citadel

The Small palace - the eastern half

Khan's dwelling. At the front - the family church built by prince Boris I
SStanilov2, p. 88

Detail of a dwelling
SVaklinov, p. 48

The layout of the two parts of the Small Palace is repeated in two other buildings. One of them was built over the filled-in reservoir next to the western wall of the Citadel, the other is the so-called Bolyar's dwelling. It is situated outside of the Citadel and is traditionally assumed to had belonged to a Pliska nobleman, an associate of the ruler. Its layout and building technique make us conclude that, althought it was situated outside of the brick wall of the Citadel, it was part of the Palace complex. Could it had been used by visitors to the ruler, as a guestroom?

A stone building outside the walled complex
SVaklinov, p. 64

Three more buildings, built by the same materials and single-celled, also belong to the architectural monuments of the first group. The first (No 32) is situated not far from the eastern gate of the stone fortress. Initially it represented a spacious rectangle, with thick walls and a façade facing the gate. Later a colonnade was built in front of it and, probably, a staircase. The other two buildings are situated in the north-eastern corner of the Citadel. They hug the northern and the eastern wall. The driven into the ground wooden poles of circular cross-section at their foundations makes us assign them to the later stage of monumental stone construction. Their functions are not clear.

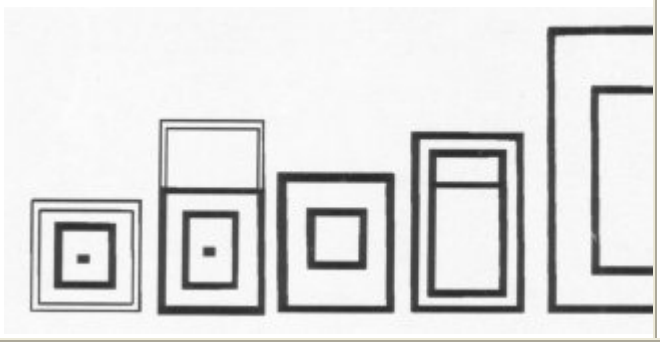
The **pagan temple**s also belong to this architectural complex. Architecturally, they are of two types. The temple to the west of the Throne Palace was a massive quadrangular building surrounded at all sides by corridors which could had either formed an open colonnade with a lower roof or be entirely walled up. The orientation of the long axis of the temple is East-West. The second temple, situated next to the dwelling of the rulers (i.e. the Small Palace?, V.K.) is oriented North-South and consists of two concentrically situated volumes, divided by a skirting corridor. The corridor has small reservoirs, probably for cultic use. A stone pedestal was found in the centre of the inner room – a place for sacrifice or a base of a stone statue. These temples stood isolated, there are no additional rooms or buildings in their vicinity. It is assumed that they are connected with the cult of the Proto-Bulgarian god Tangra.

SStanilov2, p. 57	The pagan temple next to the khan's dwelling in the Citadel	*SVaklinov, p. 48*

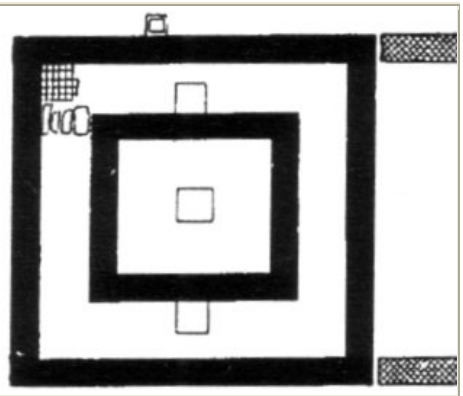
The pagan temple next to the Small palace
ZAladzhov, p. 14

The pagan temple beneath the Palace church
ZAladzhov, p. 15

Pagan temple in the foundations of the Palace church
SVaklinov, p. 64



Layouts of the pagan temples with concentric quadrangles from Pliska, Madara and Veliki Preslav
ZAladzhov, p. 7

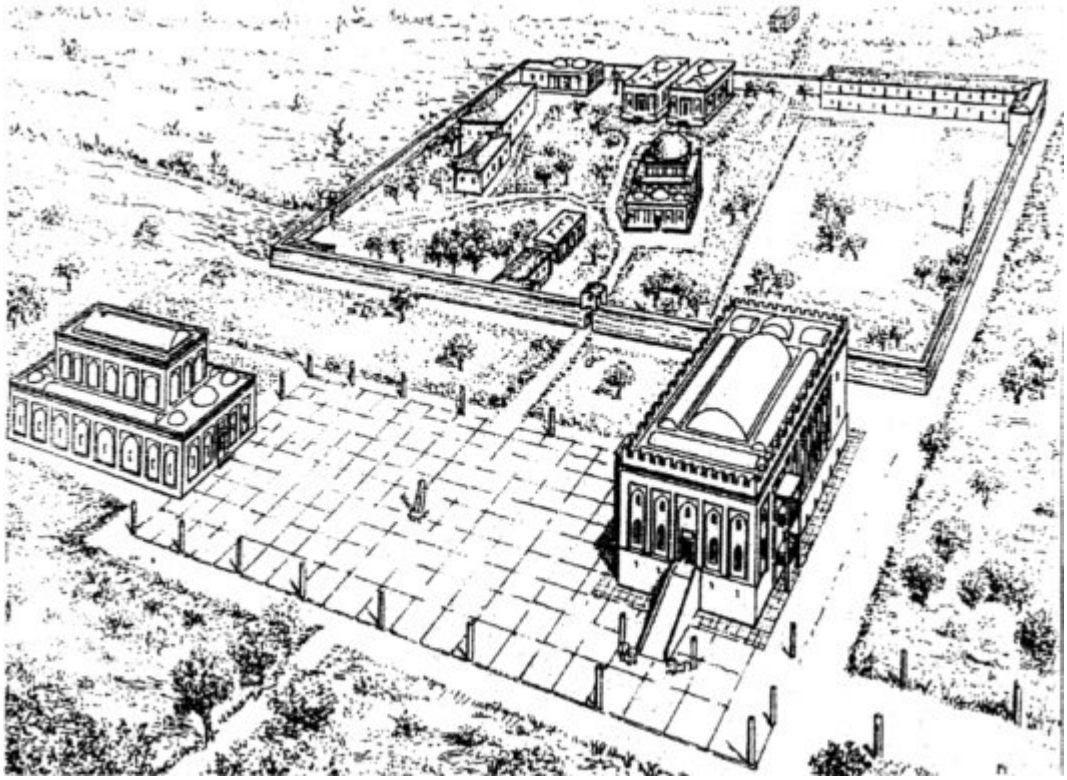


The temples in the Palace complex at Pliska (layout after P. Karasimeonov) and in Stobi, the Republic of Macedonia
NTjuleshkov, p. 45

Graphical reconstruction of the khan's dwelling
DOvcharov, p. 76

Graphical reconstruction of the Large pagan temple at the centre of Pliska
DOvcharov, p. 75

Graphical reconstruction of the Small pagan temple next to the khan's dwelling
DOvcharov, p. 76



Graphical reconstruction of the centre of Pliska. *DOvcharov, p. 73*

The **baths** are one of the most characteristic elements of the Pliska Palace. They are a real wonder in the middle of this dry plain, where the subterranean water level is nowadays at 10-12 m. depth. They were feeded by an 7 km long aqueduct. Their small size distinguishes them from the large Roman baths, but their principal lay out and the conctruction of the heating installation (hypocaust) links them with the Antique and the then Byzantine traditions. There are four baths, all within the Citadel. Earliest amongst them are the one to the south of the reservoir and the round bath which was long assumed to had represented a reservoir. Later is the massive three-cell baths built partially on top of the abandoned round baths. Latest is the baths next to the southern entrance. Their existance can be roughtly dated to within the IX c. and they are a sign of developed living standards, not yet known at the courts of other formed or in the process of formation new Eiropean states. The proximity and the contacts of Bulgaria with Byzantium facilitated the introduction of the technical and life-style innovations – all part of the prestige and of the developed needs of the Bulgarian rulers.

The **churches** form their own and comparatively numerous group of monuments. The two most important Christian temples – the Palace Church and the Large Basilica, were discovered as early as during the excavations of K. Schkorpil. More churches was found later and they appear even on the first archaeological map of Pliska. They belong to different types. The Palace Church is in fact the re-used older pagan temple.

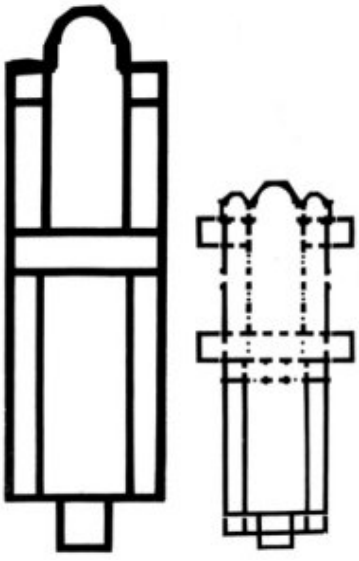
Initially, only its interior was restructured, with a three-sectioned altar added to it. Later the church enclosed the outer walls of the temple, which were enforced by an additional wall. A new alter with three deep semicircular apses was built.

The Palace church

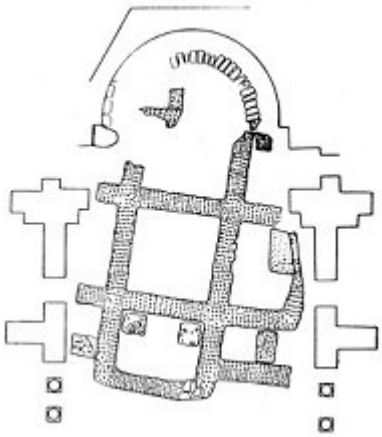
The Large basilica was built over an earlier cross-like building whose condition at present leaves little clues to its function. It has been suggested the earlier building was a church, a pagan temple or a Christian sepulchre (martyry). The basilica, 99 m long together with its walled courtyard, in some aspects resembles the basilicas of Latin type. It is assumed its construction started at the time of the Rome's church mission in Bulgaria (866-870 AD). Its main part is divided in three naves, ending in their estern side with three-walled apses. Two rectangular rooms adjoin the side naves. The southern one served as baptistery, it contains the remains of a cross-shaped water basin. The northern one contains the remains of a marble altar table. It is assumed it was part of a chapel of a important clergyman, probably Prince Boris I himself. Around the basilica there was built a large monastery, built of three distinctive parts, separated by walls. The first part contained the basilica itself, the seat of the Bulgarian archbishop, the school and the monastery necropolis. The second one included the monastic dwellings, the kitchen, the refectory, and food stores. The third one had economic functions.

The Large basilica:

Aerial view



Layouts of the Large basilica

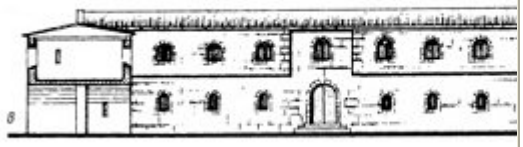


The pagan temple beneath the

SVaklinov, p. 144	from periods I and II *SVaklinov, p. 170*	foundations *SVaklinov, p. 171*

The Large basilica and the monastery around it

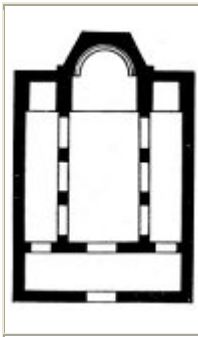
The Large basilica. The font
SVaklinov, p. 128



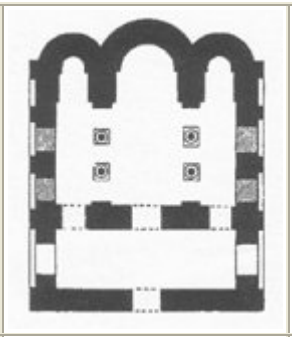
The monastery next to the Large basilica. The building hosting the literary school (after P. Georgiev)
SStanilov2, p. 90

The monastery next to the Large basilica. The palace of the archbishop of Bulgaria (after P. Georgiev)
SStanilov2, p. 94

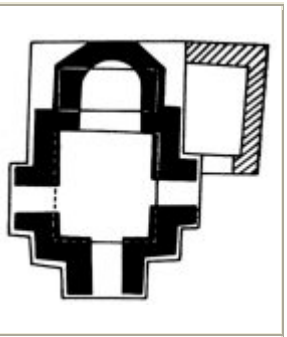
Most of the Pliska's **churches** belong to the simplified and shortened type of basilicas with three-walled or round apses. They were, it seems, square temples serving the inhabitants of the Outer town. Churches with similar layouts were built in some estates (site No 31). The church next to the Small Palace is of the cross-like domed type, the only representative of this type in Pliska. The transfer of the capital to Preslav apparently precluded its further spread. There are single examples of single-nave and of three-conchal churches in Pliska.



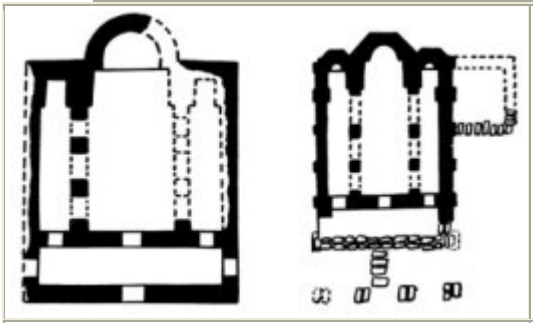
A typical basilica in the Outer town
SVaklinov, p. 188



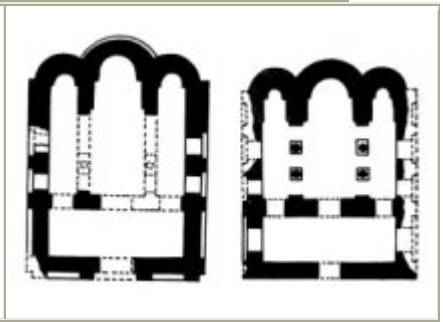
Basilica No 5 (layout after St. Mihailov)
NTjuleshkov, p. 52



Church No 3
SVaklinov, p. 189

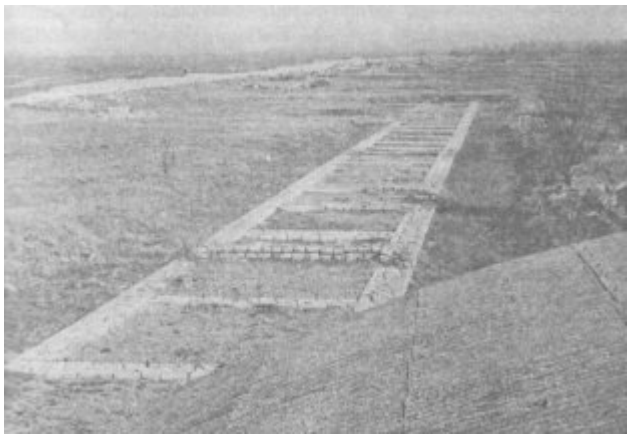


Basilica No 13. The basilica at site No 31
SVaklinov, p. 190



Basilicas No 8 and 5 in the Outer town
SVaklinov, p. 233

The **civic buildings** are of various layouts. Two single-cell buildings of broken stone in the Outer town seem to replicate the layout of building No 32. Most widely-spread is the “chain” type of buildings, composed of a row of single-celled rooms with a common wall at their back. They sometimes form a complex around an inner yard. The longest such building is situated next to the southerm gate and probably served the needs of traders and craftsmen.



The chain building near the Southern gate

Similar in character were the chain-buildings along the road from the Citadel to the northern gate. A part of such building stood between the Throne Palace and the eastern gate. In most cases this layout was used to form rectangular closed inner yards, with churches standing at the centre of some of them. Such complexes (sites

No No 31, 40 and 41) are identified as noblemen's estates in the Outer town as well as two complexes in the Inner town. Such buildings were built, at various periods, in the north-eastern and the south-western corner of the Citadel. According to the discovered remains, the chain-buildings belong to the "post-capital" Bulgarian stage of the development of Pliska. Some of them – in the Inner town, survived until the abandonment of Pliska in the XI c. Such is the ensemble near the southern half of the western fortress wall. The largest similar estate is situated along the northern fortress wall. It was surrounded by a stone wall of length comparable to the length of the fortress wall and encompassing an area of 24 hectares. So far isolated trenches revealed only the extent/direction of the wall. Inside, the remains of dwellings, trade and crafts' buildings are expected to be found. The appearance of such ensembles is a common feature of both capitals. They trace a trend of formation of estates belonging to high-ranking officials or rich land-owners. For Pliska it has been found out that the process of formation of such estates, accompanied probably by expropriation of the surrounding lands, was connected with a partial depopulation of the Outer town. The displaced population settled within the boundaries of the by then accessible to them Inner town.

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3. ZLATARSKI V.N. Gde nuzhno iskat' pervuyu bolgarskuyu stolicu – Trudy XI Arheologicheskogo suezda v Kieve 1899 g. T. II. Protokoly. M., 1902, p. 116-118.

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5. FILOV B. Edna problema iz istoriyata na Aboba. – Bulgarska sbirka XV, 1908, p. 250-256.

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7. KARASSIMEONOFF P. Neue Ausgrabungen in der Residenz von Pliska. – IBAI XIV, 1940/1942, p. 136-168.

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13. GEORGIEVA S. Po vuprosa za haraktera na rannosrednovekovnata bulgarska kultura. Arheologiya 1962, 3, p. 1-5; MILCHEV AT. Po vuprosa za kulturata na slavyani i prabulgari v nashite zemi prez rannoto srednovekovie. Arheologiya 1964, 2, p. 1-12.

14. STANCHEV ST. Slavyani i prabulgari v starobulgarskata kultura. – Arheologiya 1962, 4, p. 1-6.

15. For general reviews of the excavations till that time see: VAKLINOV ST. Pliska za trideset godini. – Arheologiya 1974, 3, p. 28-39; MILCHEV AT. Razkopki v Pliska (1945-1970). - Arheologiya 1974, 3, p. 39-48.

16. For a general review of the results of the excavation in the Inner town during 1974-1994 cf. RASHEV R. Pliskovskiyat aul. – Pliska-Preslav 7, 1995, p. 10-22.